

REMARKS:

Claims 1, 3-4, and 7-29 are pending in the present application.

Applicants appreciate the Examiner's thorough examination of the application. Although Applicants recognize that the Examiner is not obligated to consider or enter this amendment in response to the rejections set forth in the Final Office Action dated November 10, 2005, Applicants believe that the claim amendments and brief remarks contained herein will assist the Examiner in understanding the distinctions between the claimed invention and the cited prior art references, thus obviating the need for an appeal.

Addressing first claims 25-29, which were added in response to a prior Office Action, the Examiner has rejected independent claim 25 as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,676,284 issued to Wynne Wilson. The '284 Patent teaches two separate and discrete constructions for an illumination device. A first embodiment is illustrated in Figures 1-8, while a second embodiment is illustrated in Figure 9. The rejection of independent claim 25 was based primarily on the second embodiment, which is illustrated below:

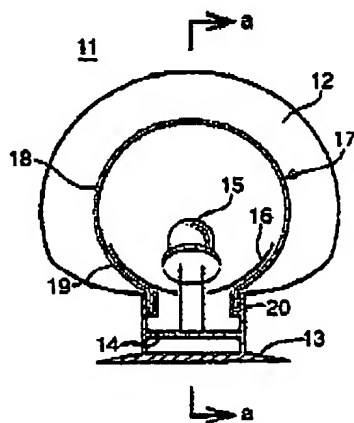


FIG. 9

Specifically, an elongate diffuser 12 is mounted on a base 13, with a printed circuit board also mounted on the base 13. The LEDs 15 are then mounted to this circuit board 14 and extend into the hollow interior portion of the diffuser 12. In the application, the elongate diffuser 12 is characterized as "tube-like." See column 6, line 9. One preferred elongate diffuser 12 is "in the form of a flexible tube approximately 25 mm-100 mm (1-4 inches) in diameter...." See column 9, lines 19-20. Furthermore, and referring again to Figure 9, interposed between the elongate diffuser 12 and the LEDs 15 is an "inner diffuser 17 having translucent upper portion 18 and lower portion 19 which locates into slot 20 on the base. The inner diffuser is typically of different material from the outer diffuser and 3M's Optical Light Film as used in their 'Light Pipe' (registered trade mark) mounted on a substantially transparent support is particularly suitable...." See column 13, lines 8-14. Accordingly, the '284 Patent actually suggests the use of a thin, film-like inner diffuser 17 spaced a distance from an essentially hollow and tube-like outer diffuser 12.

Claim 25 of the present application has been amended to clarify that the recited illumination device includes "an essentially solid and a-substantially rod-like member...," which readily distinguishes it from the film-like inner diffuser 17 and tube-like outer diffuser 12 described in the '284 Patent. The essentially solid nature of this rod-like member assists in achieving the desired light intensity and uniformity, as the essentially solid rod preferentially directs light along its length while also urging the light out its light-emitting surface.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the illumination device recited in claim 25 (as amended) is neither anticipated nor suggested by U.S. Patent No. 6,676,284 or any of the other cited prior art references. Furthermore, claims 26-29 depend from claim 25 and are each

believed to be allowable in light of the argument set forth above with respect to claim 25.

Returning now to a discussion of claims 1-24, Applicants respectfully maintain that the combination of Japanese Patent No. 61165583 (Takeichi) and U.S. Patent No. 4,195,907 (Zamja) is improper. In the present application, the clear objective is to cause "the collective light pattern on the light-emitting surface of the waveguide [rod-like member] to appear to an observer to have a uniform intensity along the length of the waveguide [rod-like member]." See Application at p. 8, lines 11-12. This is readily contrasted to Zamja, in which the "optical inhomogeneities" are used to create "decorative points of light." Specifically, "[a] viewer will see a point or spark of light at this place along the length of the fiber." See '907 Patent at column 3, lines 36-37.

To emphasize this important distinction, claims 1 and 19 have been amended to clarify that the resultant light intensity pattern is substantially uniform and devoid of hot spots. Therefore, even if the references could be properly combined, the obviousness rejection would still fail since "the prior art references (or references when combined) must teach or suggest all of the claims limitations." M.P.E.P. § 706.02(j) (emphasis added). Specifically, modifying the device of Takeichi by providing the rod-like member with the "optical inhomogeneities" taught by Zamja would result in an illumination device that does not provide a uniform light intensity pattern along the length of the rod-like member because there would be hot spots, i.e., "decorative points of light."

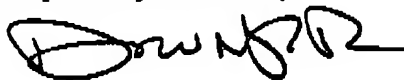
Finally, and as mentioned in response to a prior Office Action, Takeichi and Zamja, in combination, also fail to teach the use of microballoons. Specifically, claims 1 and 19 were previously amended to clarify that the micro balloons are not merely air bubbles, but rather structural elements that include a shell. Neither Takeichi nor Zamja teach the impregnation of

such structural elements into a rod-like member for creating a substantially uniform light intensity pattern along the length of the rod-like member.

For the reasons set forth above, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 1 and 19, as amended, are neither anticipated by nor obvious in view of the cited prior art references, and therefore, are now in condition for allowance. Claims 3-4, 7-18, and 20-24 depend from claims 1 or 19, and are believed to be allowable in view of the arguments presented above with respect to claims 1 and 19.

In light of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request allowance of all claims now pending in this Application.

Respectfully submitted,



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